

DECLARATION OF MICHELLE BRANE

I, Michelle Brané, make the following declaration based on my personal knowledge and declare under the penalty of perjury pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746 that the following is true and correct:

1. I am a non-resident migration and human rights fellow at Cornell Law and the Executive Director of Together and Free. I hold a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center. I am over the age of 18 and am competent to testify regarding the matters described below.
2. I have more than 25 years of experience working on immigration and human rights issues. Prior to my work at Together and Free, I served for three years as the Executive Director for the Department of Homeland Security's Family Reunification Task Force, and then as DHS's Ombudsman for Immigration Detention. Before that, I was the Director of the Migrant Rights and Justice program at the Women's Refugee Commission for almost 15 years, where I worked on projects related to immigration custody, family detention and separation, and access to asylum at the U.S. border.
3. I have authored and overseen numerous landmark reports on migration and asylum issues, including *Locking Up Family Values*, on family detention; *Halfway Home*, on unaccompanied migrant children; *Forced From Home: The Lost Boys and Girls of Central America*; *Prison for Survivors: The Detention of Women Seeking Asylum in the United States*; *Detained or Deported: What About My Children?*, a guide for detained and deported immigrant and undocumented parents; and *Betraying Family Values: How Immigration Policy at the United States Border is Separating Families*.
4. I have testified before Congress and the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, and I present regularly as an expert at conferences, briefings, and professional trainings, including before the Human Rights Council and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Geneva.
5. Together and Free is a nonprofit organization that provides emergency and ongoing support services to asylum seeking families impacted by federal immigration policies.
6. My staff and I have received outreach from families of individuals removed to El Salvador by the United States government, including the families of 5 Venezuelan citizens believed to have been removed to El Salvador on Sunday, March 30, 2025.
7. I first learned of the March 30 flight when it was announced on social media by Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Monday, March 31, 2025. On Monday March 31, I was contacted by an attorney who believed her client was on the flight based on a family member who had seen him in a video posted by Secretary of State Rubio. Over the next week, four additional families reached out to Together and Free with concerns that a family member had been removed on the March 30th flight.

8. On April 2, 2025, an article in the Orinoco Tribune entitled “Seven More Venezuelans Migrants Abducted in El Salvador” included the names of 7 Venezuelan nationals who were removed on the March 30, flight to El Salvador. All 5 of the names that had been provided to us by family members appeared on that list.
9. The first of these cases involves Victor Andres Ortega Burbano, a 24-year-old Venezuelan citizen with muscular dystrophy which affects his right arm. His wife reported to Together and Free that he arrived in the United States in 2022. We are not aware of any criminal record. Victor applied for Temporary Protective Status (TPS) on December 28, 2023 and was granted this status on June 20, 2024.
10. Records reflect that an immigration judge ordered Victor removed to Venezuela on October 22, 2024.
11. Victor was released from detention following his removal order. His family told us that on March 11, 2025, while checking his mailbox at his home at 11:30 a.m., he was surrounded by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents and arrested. His family was able to track his detention locations thereafter through the on-line ICE detainee tracker and by occasionally speaking to him by phone. He was first taken to and detained at a facility in Alvarado, Texas. The following day he was removed to the El Valle ICE detention facility in Raymondville, Texas, where he was detained for a little over two weeks.
12. On Friday, March 28, at about 11 p.m., his wife spoke to him while he was still detained in El Valle, Texas. He told her that ICE agents had informed him that he was to be deported to Venezuela. He then called her on Sunday, March 30, 2025, indicating that he was now detained at Guantanamo. He told her that he did not know where he was to be taken next, or if he would be kept at Guantanamo. That was the last contact that his wife had with him. On March 31, 2025, his family learned that he was on the March 30 flight to El Salvador through a social media post.
13. Together and Free is currently investigating the cases of an additional 3 Venezuelan men, all of whom we believe had final removal orders to Venezuela and we have reason to suspect were removed to Guantanamo and then El Salvador on the evening of March 30, 2025.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Executed this 8th day of April 2025 at Ithaca, NY.



Michelle Brané